

612 Indiana Avenue, NW (Commercial Building)  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-509

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DC,  
WASH,  
317-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Like its neighbors to the east, 612 Indiana Avenue is a typical Mid Nineteenth Century commercial building. It is three stories high with an addition in the rear. The overall dimensions for the front portion are 26' wide by 33' deep. The rear addition spans the full lot width at the first floor, with the second level being an ell approximately 12' wide.

The structure is very straightforward: masonry party walls supporting wooden floors and a flat roof with a slight southward slope.

The facade presents most of its early, if not original elements: a decorative wooden storefront at sidewalk level, three window bays on the upper two floors and a wood fascia and metal cornice at the top of the roof parapet. The windows are all square headed with wooden double hung sash and six over six lights.

Except for the first floor, the interior layout has undergone little alteration. A half turn stairway along the east wall communicates all floors. Access to the upper level of the ell at the rear occurs at the landing between the first and the second floor. The first floor space has been fragmented into smaller offices by stud partitions. The second floor has the original layout: unequal rooms along the front and one alongside the stairwell that reaches the rear of the building. Both rooms along the west have fireplaces with elegant Neo-Classical mantels. The ell has one room at the rear and a bathroom that opens to a lightwell along the west. The third floor repeats the layout of the level below.

Finishes throughout the upper levels of the building are consistent: plaster directly applied to masonry party walls, and to wood lath on stud partitions and ceilings. The floors are all wood, in some instances covered with linoleum. The stairwell has an interesting curved wooden handrail on slender balusters. The handrail runs uninterrupted over the massive cylindrical newels that occur at each landing.

### ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

This building has a high degree of cultural value because of the integrity of its facade, which includes an original Nineteenth Century storefront. In addition, 612 Indiana Avenue forms part of a row of three similar traditional buildings that present little transformation to their original design. This row, together with

another grouping across the street clearly shows the Nineteenth Century discrepancy between the grandeur of the L'Enfant plan avenues and the provincial quality of early development in the city.

#### SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

Facade: The most extraordinary aspect of this facade is its handsome old storefront, which has been conserved in a fairly unaltered condition. The storefront, which has a typical a-b-c-b rhythm, provides for an offset symmetrical composition over the ground level commercial area that consists of a door flanked by show windows. On the east end is another door that serves as the entrance to the upper floors. The storefront is framed in wood and has some selectively applied metal ornaments. The overall four bay division is established by wood posts. In front of each post, there is evidence that there once occurred a single disengaged colonnette, whose capitals still remain. On top of these there are metal brackets that support a projecting canopy. The canopy spans the entire width of the first floor. The brackets present decorative floral relief panels on their sides and fluting on the front. Beaded boards constitute the soffit. Wooden fascia boards and a wooden cavetto establish the cornice, which is additionally embellished by a metal saw-tooth frieze. A wooden Victorian corbel table acts as a cove below the soffit, spanning between the brackets.

The door and window frames are also in wood and feature decorative chamfers on the arris. Below the two show windows, the spandrels are decorated by two recessed panels. The window proper is divided into four lights by cruciform wooden muntins. The entry door to the upper floors has four panels and a transom light above them. The entry to the street level is through double wood doors, with a glazed upper panel.

In comparison to the ground level, the second and third floors of the facade are extremely simple. Three windows occur on each level. All are square headed, with wooden sills and lintels. The lintels have a decorative top molding in insinuation of a cornice. The wooden sash are double hung with six/six lights.

The roof parapet presents a decorative wood and metal entablature. Three cornice brackets spring from the architrave and reinforce the three-bay division of the upper facade (the easternmost bracket does not exist). On each span between the brackets, five metal block modillions spring from the frieze to provide further visual support of the projecting metal cornice.